Why Representation in Gaming Matters

Community NerdyBirdy Aug 19, 2022

Our media and culture shape all of us. Whether deliberately or inadvertently, we all find examples or role models to follow in the music, movies, and books we listen to, watch, and read. Because of media's influence on our lives, we must understand the importance of creating characters and narratives that can be honest, thoughtful, and representative of a diverse and varied audience.

As a significant source of entertainment and recreation for millions of people worldwide, video games are no different than other media in creating intense relationships between characters and fans. Countless gamers have identified with their favorite heroes and heroines and looked to gaming narratives as a source of comfort, understanding, and support.

Ensuring All Gamers Feel Represented

Creating diverse storylines is especially important for gamers who are often not represented in games. In 2019, only 5% of games featured a female protagonist, and representation can be even more sparse for gamers of racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities. But gaming can still be a source of identity and pride for gamers.

For Bowser914, a first-generation Guatemalan American Xbox Ambassador of Mayan descent, gaming was a turning point in his identity. "Growing up I was always embarrassed to be an Indigenous person. Early on I started playing *Age of Empires* and realized that the Mayan Civilization was one of the best and it got me interested in learning more about my people."

And for Xbox Ambassador MahatMama1283, seeing herself within a game helped spark a greater identification with her community. "*Raji: An Ancient Epic* really moved me. The protagonist is an Indian girl, and my daughter was so excited to see that. I, as a grown woman, was elated. It was an amazing opportunity for me to be reminded of the beautiful culture I came from."

But the importance of representation in gaming is not only limited to ensuring that all gamers feel seen and heard, as necessary as that is. Modeling unique and diverse characters and stories also allows for different perspectives and stories to be shared with audiences who might not otherwise encounter those narratives.

Sharing New Stories and Perspectives

For many gamers, games like *Tell Me Why*, or *Life is Strange: True Colors* were the first positive media portrayals that they had seen of LGBTQIA+ narratives. For Xbox Ambassador KODA89, the game Hades was the first positive portrayal of a bisexual man that they'd ever seen. "Along my journey to escape the bowels of the underworld and help Zagreus learn more about himself, I would end up learning something about myself as well. Hades helped me realize that I was actually bisexual."

Allowing for a broader range of storytelling not only expands the potential for different narratives but also ensures the complete representation of its entire audience. A common comment heard from gamers is that gaming was one of the first times they saw their community positively portrayed in any form of media.

Gaming is a uniquely powerful form of storytelling. When combined with empathy and considerate storytelling, gaming can be a powerful force for inclusion.